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# A Critical Juncture: American Foreign Policy and Asymmetric Warfare; Strategic Insights, v. 8, issue 2 (April 2009)

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## A Critical Juncture: *American Foreign Policy and Asymmetric Warfare*

by [John Maszka](#)

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### Introduction

Asymmetric warfare is arguably the main threat facing the United States since the end of the Cold War. Gone are the years when America knew who its enemy was, and more importantly, knew *where* it was. With the Obama administration now in the White House, this is a crucial juncture in American foreign policymaking. The following pages examine the body of scholarship on asymmetric warfare as it has been impacted by the three primary components of American foreign policy: unilateralism, preemption, and military hegemony. This article asks two central questions. First it inquires as to whether these three key components of America's foreign policy, popularly known as the Bush Doctrine, have been more extreme under the administration of President George W. Bush than they have under previous administrations. The second question is whether the Bush Doctrine has increased asymmetric warfare in the form of terrorism—or whether it has been an effective policy against it. The article begins by examining the Bush administration's foreign policy as outlined in both the 2002 and the 2006 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), investigating the history of each of the three primary components of the Bush Doctrine in America: unilateralism, preemption, and military hegemony—and reviewing the opinions of a number of scholars, security professionals, and journalists as to whether the impact of these initiatives reduced global asymmetric warfare in the form of terrorism or whether it incited more terrorist activity.

### The Bush Doctrine

*"Today, our enemies see weapons of mass destruction as weapons of choice."*

—President George W. Bush, 2002 *National Security Strategy*

The Bush Doctrine can be summed up in three concepts: preemption, unilateralism, and military hegemony. Based on the Bush Administration's policy as delineated in both the 2002 and the 2006 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), and of course popularly coined after President Bush's public address following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Bush Doctrine clearly states "we cannot let our enemies strike first... we will not hesitate to act alone... we must build and maintain our defenses beyond challenge" (Bush, 2002). While the Bush Doctrine has its staunch supporters, many others argue that rather than having extended America's global reach, enhanced its status as the sole remaining superpower, and advanced democracy throughout the world, the Bush Doctrine has instead served to politically isolate the United States, discredit it in the eyes of the global community, and that it has served as the apparatus for American imperialism:

Having spooked ourselves into believing that we have no option but to act fast, alone, unilaterally and pre-emptively, we have managed in six years to destroy decades of international good will, alienate allies, embolden enemies and yet solve few of the major international problems we face (Zakaria, 2007:24).

One big problem with the Bush Doctrine according to Wilhelmsen and Flikke (2005) is that, at least in the case of Russia, it is being emulated. If the United States can justify preemption and unilateralism in defense of its national security, why can't everyone else? This, of course, would be catastrophic in several, if not most (or all) cases. Suppose India decides it totally justified in preempting Pakistan? No Security Council authorization? No problem. The same scenario can be imagined of Pakistan against India, China against Taiwan (or vice versa), Israel against any number of its neighbors, Iran against Israel or the United States, North Korea against... We all get the picture. So why did the Bush administration favor this seemingly counterproductive foreign policy strategy? This is now a moot question. A much more relevant question is whether the Obama administration would be wise to embrace a similar foreign policy.

While there is much to be applauded in the 2002 NSS, particularly given the context of the September 11 attacks (and there are definitely those that do applaud it as well as those who do not), we now have the advantage of hindsight. This hindsight has revealed several things, from the nonexistence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq, to the fragile nature of America's global credibility. Perhaps America has begun to learn the meaning of Metternich's most fitting phrase: "When Paris has a cold, all Europe sneezes." Now that much of the adrenaline of 9/11 has subsided, and especially with the upcoming presidential elections, it would be wise to re-examine our position in world affairs, reassess our leadership role, and adapt our foreign policy objectives to better serve both our national security and the ever-changing global security environment. To best do this, we should attempt to understand where we are now, and more importantly, how we arrived here. Therefore, in the following section, I examine the history of American unilateralism.

## The History of American Unilateralism

*"Our purpose as a nation is firm... to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil."*

—President George W. Bush, September 14, 2001.

To discuss American unilateralism, it would be beneficial to first define unilateralism and then contrast it to multilateralism. Henry Liu (2006:1) offers the following definition of unilateralism:

State policies or actions are deemed 'unilateral' if they have significant impacts on people in other states but undertaken by a single state without the mandate of bilateral or multilateral treaties or in violation or defiance or rejection of such treaties.

We will quickly find, however, that while Liu's definition seems straightforward enough, it is by no means universally accepted. This becomes obvious when we contrast unilateralism with multilateralism. Robert Keohane (1990:731) defines multilateralism as "the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states." This presents a quantitative discrepancy with Liu's definition of unilateralism. In all respects however, the definitions are the same in principle. I lean toward the use of Keohane's "three or more" definition as it is more in the spirit of multilateralism, particularly as it applies to America's relationship with the United Nations.

There is certainly no clear consensus as to when unilateralism became the official stance of U.S. foreign policy. There is however, little doubt that unilateralism is the prevailing principle today. Melvyn Leffler (2005: 441) stresses the continuity between Bush's unilateralism and those of the "basic traditions of U.S. foreign policy that go back to the Plan of Treaties of 1776 and the

Declaration of Independence.” Leffler himself clearly admits to wide disagreement on the subject, stating that while some such as Robert Kagan, Walter Hixson, Carolyn Eisenberg, and Daniel Drezner are largely in agreement with this position, others such as Arnold Offner and Anna Kasten are not.

Also on the Leffler side of the debate, Lawrence S. Finkelstein (2006) argues that regarding the United Nations, “the United States was far from comfortable with the thought that the United Nations should be a source of laws for the United States to obey.” The U.S. championed favorable wording in what eventually came to be known as the “domestic jurisdiction” clause, which decided what legal issues fell under domestic jurisdiction. The U.S. also refused to accept the World Court’s compulsory jurisdiction, and with the Connally Amendment, it demanded the right to decide for itself what legal issues fell under its own domestic jurisdiction.

Likewise, Liu (2006:1, 4) traces U.S. unilateralism to influences of the Christian Right on U.S. foreign policy following World War II. According to Liu, American unilateralism “was the ideological basis for the Cold War with a self-righteous Superpower leading subservient allies who did not have the wherewithal to resist it.” American unilateralism has continued beyond the end of the Cold War despite allies’ “attempts to assert increasing independence with the disappearance of perceived Soviet threat.” Liu quotes Huntington:

The unipolar moment has passed. Even old allies stubbornly resist American demands, while many other nations view U.S. policy and ideals as openly hostile to their own. Washington is blind to the fact that it no longer enjoys the dominance it had at the end of the Cold War. It must relearn the game of international politics as a major power, not a superpower, and make compromises. U.S. policymaking should reflect rational calculations of power rather than a wish list of arrogant, unilateralist demands.<sup>[1]</sup>

While Liu (2006: 4) clearly states that “U.S. unilateralism did not start with the Bush Administration,” he does make a point to recount some of the many blatant actions taken by the Bush Administration to flex its unilateral displeasure, as well as some equally blatant responses. For example, Liu condemns the Bush Administration’s unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, its refusal to honor America’s commitment to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and its invasion of Iraq without UN authority—bringing Kofi Annan’s public denunciation of President Bush’s war against Iraq as illegal.

Further investigation reveals that Offner and Kasten are not the only ones to disagree with Leffler. On the opposite side of the debate, David C. Hendrickson (2006: 274, 278, 280) acknowledges that “preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony are often seen as the defining characteristics of American foreign policy.” Yet he argues that far from being “focused on preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony,” early American foreign policy was based on the principles of peace, the fabric of international law and the institution of neutrality. In his argument against historian John Lewis Gaddis’ proposal that the war on terror has precedent in early American history, Hendrickson quotes John Quincy Adams: “We should retreat to the wall before taking up arms, and be sure at every step to put them as much as possible in the wrong.” While conceding that there are definitely instances in American history that U.S. actions must be defined as preemptive (the Mexican War under Polk), or hegemonic (the conquest and decimation of the Native Americans), Hendrickson flatly denies that this was the “default position or original understanding of American statecraft.” Hendrickson compares modern proponents of the Iraq War with earlier proponents of the Mexican War:

There is much in the argument over the contemporary Iraq War that recalls the argument over the Mexican War. If contemporary proponents of ‘preemption, unilateralism, and hegemony’ want to stand on the narrow shoulders of President Polk, they have every right to do so. But to view Polk’s actions as typical of policies pursued by a generation is to do an injustice to the historical record... To those representative American statesmen of the second generation who had most

thoroughly imbibed the pacific precepts of the American system and who stood near death at the time of the war—Adams, Gallatin, Clay, and Webster—the war appeared an alien and repulsive event, a repudiation of everything their country stood for.

Far less accommodating than Hendrickson, Stanley Hoffman (2006:1-2) marks a clear line of demarcation between Bush's unilateralism and past American foreign policy, calling it "America's new unilateralism." According to Hoffmann, neoconservatives such as Cheney and Rumsfeld were "enraged" by the Clinton administration's failure to act unilaterally and proclaim U.S. hegemony. "When George W. Bush came to power, September 11 provided what seemed an unchallengeable opportunity for a drastic change in strategy and in diplomacy." Likewise, Kim Holmes (2007:21) describes President Bush's policy of unilateralism as a "revolutionary approach to U.S. foreign policy." Even Charles Krauthammer (2001) described President Bush's unilateralism as something new:

With ABM and Kyoto, the new unilateralism is earning notice. It began with a great gnashing of teeth by our allies: Nations that spent the better part of the last 500 years raping and pillaging vast swaths of the globe now pronounce themselves distressed at the arrogance of the United States for refusing, at the height of its power, to play the docile international citizen.

Bruce Cronin (2001:104) squarely places the emergence of unilateralism on President Bush's shoulders. After carefully explaining that while "an empire can arise through naked conquest,... hegemony is a form of leadership not domination," Cronin paints the picture of the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. victory over Iraq, and the hard-earned rise of America as the leader of a new multilateral order; but then laments:

Yet soon after building broad international support for a new order based on multilateralism under American leadership, the U.S. began to pursue a series of unilateral policies in the face of widespread opposition from the other great powers. The U.S.-inspired anti-Iraq coalition had symbolized the rise of a new hegemonic era in which U.S. leadership was broadly acknowledged. However, several years later, America's announcement that it would take unilateral action against Iraq over the strong objection of several members of the United Nations Security Council undermined the multilateralism it had so recently espoused.

James Dobbins (2004) likewise notes:

Before Sept. 11, 2001, the moderate, conservative, and neoconservative elements of the Bush administration's policy had been in rough balance. The 9/11 attacks changed all this. They stimulated an immediate and understandably unilateralist impulse to retaliate. Americans had been hit; they wanted to strike back, and they were in no mood to wait until a larger international posse could be formed.

Xu Weidi (2002:121) also places the unilateral burden on the Bush Administration: "Since George W. Bush took office, the United States has turned away from many international arms control agreements and instead chosen to pursue its interests through unilateral means." Weidi blames the dominating "mood of pessimism" on "recent setbacks in the area of international arms control, many of which can be attributed to U.S. unilateralism."

Jim Lobe (2002) published a piece that offers us a little history lesson regarding the emergence of the policy of unilateralism as it predates President Bush, but clearly pinpointing the implementation of it during the Bush administration's first term. Lobe described the appearance of a certain document that had been leaked to the *New York Times* in the spring of 1992. That document, written by Paul Wolfowitz and Irve Lewis Libby (who at the time worked at the Pentagon under Dick Cheney), was the draft Defense Policy Guidance (DPG). The draft DPG called for American unilateralism, military hegemony, and a policy of preemption. Lobe wrote that

the draft DPG was described by one U.S. senator as “literally a Pax Americana.” Lobe himself states that the draft DPG was “essentially a vision of a world dominated by the unilateral use of U.S. military power.” Its intended goal: to “prevent the rise of any possible challenger for the foreseeable future.” Sound familiar? [\[2\]](#)

Obviously, quite a bit had changed between the spring of 1992 when the draft DPG was first leaked and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The controversy caused by the leaked draft DPG led then-National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of State James Baker to insist that “the final DPG was toned down to the point of unrecognizability.” By September 11, 2001, Cheney had risen to Vice President, Wolfowitz to Deputy Defense Secretary and Libby to Cheney’s Chief of Staff. In its first year in office, the Bush administration “engineered what former UN ambassador Richard Holbrooke recently described as a ‘radical break with 55 years of bipartisan tradition’ in U.S. foreign policy making” (Lobe, 2002). G. John Ikenberry wrote:

According to this new paradigm, America is to be less bound to its partners and to global rules and institutions while it steps forward to play a more unilateral and anticipatory role in attacking terrorist threats and confronting rogue states seeking WMD... In that respect, the war on terrorism must be seen as a facade for a much more ambitious strategy of projecting U.S. military power around the world (Lobe, 2002).

Kuang (2005:160) argues that just as “Hitler used the burning of the Reichstag for his own ends, President Bush manipulated and took advantage of the fear created by the 9/11 attacks.” Kuang quotes Nelson Mandela, who referring to the Bush administration, stated “anybody, and particularly the leaders of the superpowers, who takes unilateral action outside the framework of the U.N. must receive the condemnation of all who love peace... that country and its leader are a danger to the world.”

Nelson Mandela was not simply uttering eloquent liberal phrases in pursuit of a photo opportunity. Many realist scholars and security experts agree that his words are packed with practicality. While most of Europe was operating under the collective lead of the United Nations, “conservative unilateralists assumed that unrivaled power relieved the United States of the need to cater to the demands of others” (Betts, 2006:388). This not only made the United States dangerous after the 9/11 attacks due to its insistence on taking unilateral military action, it also made little practical sense. Today we have the advantage of hindsight, and we can see eight years later that the American unilateralist approach has not worked. While American foreign policymakers have spun their wheels for the past eight years, Wright (2006:288) informs us that:

Within ten days of the 9/11 attacks, the member states of the European Union had formulated a common Action Plan which proposed measures in six categories... While there is no doubt that Europe remains a primary terrorist target, it is also no coincidence that the pattern of terrorist attacks has shifted away from Europe and towards areas where states are weak or lacking in democratic legitimacy or the physical infrastructure to deal with terrorism... The Europeans, especially the Europeans of the EU, are especially well placed to provide assistance to these states.

Scholars such as Wright, and many others, strongly believe that had the Bush administration taken the multilateral approach, succumbed to UN authority, and pursued diplomacy rather than war, the result would be very different from what it currently is. But the “Bush administration has never concealed its distrust of the U.N. and its agencies. The administration didn’t want an international agency able to challenge the U.S. government” (Barry, 2007).

President Bush (2002) made the argument that America was acting multilaterally, and claimed that “the presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S.



commitments to allies and friends.” Yet concerning the largely unpopular decision to deploy U.S. troops “in both Iraq and Afghanistan,” Dobbins (2004) observed that “international participation, never very strong, was diminishing.” Perhaps the most fitting criticism of the Bush administration is actually an indictment against America itself:

On the 57th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, Hiroshima Mayor Tadatosh Akiba lashed out at the American response to the September 11th terrorist attack. He felt the U.S. response was based on the philosophy of ‘I’ll show you’ and ‘I’m stronger than you are,’ with the result in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the Middle East being the victimization of ‘women, children, the elderly, and those least able to defend themselves... The United States has no right to force Pax Americana on the rest of us, or to unilaterally determine the fate of the world’ (Carter, 2003:17).

This very angry and heartfelt denunciation strikes us all as both timeless and timely at once. The unimaginable horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki become all too imaginable as we approach the precipice of that nightmare yet again. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (2006:299) assures us that “evidence makes clear that there were alternatives to the use of the bomb, alternatives that the Truman administration for reasons of its own declined to pursue.” This simple argument alone, by virtue of its profundity, demonstrates that an earnest and sincere compassion for humanity together with a jealous defense of human dignity must beat strongly within the heart of the debate over the history and origin of American unilateralism. Without such resonance, the inquiry will produce only words on a page.

This section has taught us that there are two broad schools of thought regarding the history of American unilateralism: those who view it as preceding the George W. Bush administration, and those who insist its implementation as an explicit component of foreign policy is unique to President George W. Bush. Either way, worldwide public opinion today appears largely negative toward the United States for its adherence to this policy. Only time will reveal whether the Obama administration will take deliberate action to reverse this negative public opinion; or whether, left to grow and fester, this negative public opinion of the United States will develop into increased popular support for terrorism the world over.

## **The History of the American Policy of Preemption**

*We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries... The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively.*

—President George W, Bush, 2002 *National Security Strategy*

President Bush's 2002 *National Security Strategy* introduced a preemptive war policy that appeared to many to be just another spin on preventive war, a military doctrine viewed as nothing less than illegal by international standards. President Bush's 2006 National Security Strategy called for more of the same: “...we do not rule out the use of force before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack” (Bush, 2006). The 2006 NSS has brought renewed debate over the legitimacy of preemptive strikes, and even harsher criticism of the Bush administration.

America's insistence on going it alone has clearly grown more stubborn and futile under the Bush Administration; with the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the resulting war on terrorism serving as the sole common denominator and justification for many of America's actions. However the policy of preventive war is particularly troublesome due to its international stigma as illegal. In the

remainder of this article, I will explore and attempt to weigh the prevailing attitudes and opinions regarding the origin and implementation of the policy of preemption in America. Careful consideration of this policy is particularly relevant with the Obama administration's recent transition into office.

John Lewis Gaddis (2005:3-4) defines pre-emption as "taking military action against a state that was about to launch an attack." Gaddis informs us that "international law and practice had long allowed such actions to forestall clear and immediately present dangers." Prevention, on the other hand, is an entirely different concept. Gaddis defines preventive war as "starting a war against a state that might, at some future point, pose such risks." Gaddis continues to point out that "the Bush administration conflated these terms, using the word 'pre-emption' to justify what turned out to be a 'preventive' war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq." Gaddis also adds:

Pre-emption defined as prevention, however, runs the risk amply demonstrated over the past two years—that the United States itself will appear to much of the world as a clear and present danger. Sovereignty has long been a sacrosanct principle in the international system. For the world's most powerful state suddenly to announce that its security requires violating the sovereignty of certain other states whenever it chooses cannot help but make all other states nervous.

Dan Reiter (2003:33) offers a similar definition, stating that "preventive war occurs when one state perceives the balance of power shifting against it and it attacks sooner rather than later, when conditions would be less favorable. Preemptive war occurs when one state attacks in order to forestall a perceived imminent attack."

While it may be true that the United States has traditionally allowed for preemptive strikes in the case of an imminent threat, President Bush's call to "adapt the concept of imminent threat" was noteworthy, to say the least. Richard Falk (2002:1) calls it "radical," and he cites President Bush's June graduation address to the cadets at West Point as "the fullest articulation, so far, of the new strategic doctrine of pre-emption." Far from endorsing it, however, Falk warns:

Pre-emption... validates striking first, not in a crisis, but on the basis of shadowy intentions, alleged potential links to terrorist groups, supposed plans and projects to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and anticipations of possible future dangers. It is a doctrine without limits, without accountability to the UN or international law, without any dependence on a collective judgment of responsible governments and, what is worse, without any convincing demonstration of practical necessity.

Obviously, in the above quotation, Falk is discussing preemption à la the Bush Doctrine, not preemption as it is defined by Gaddis. This is a point that needs to be made early on, for President Bush is not the only one who *appears* to confuse the two terms of "preemption" and "preventive war." Many of the scholars and journalists who have commented on this very subject also, at first glance, appear to have confused the two terms as well. The trick is to infer whether it is an intentional acknowledgment of the radical new spin the Bush administration has placed on preemption (as in Falk's case), or whether the author(s) are truly confusing the terms themselves. This is obviously crucial to understanding the argument being made: Is the argument contending that the Bush administration's articulation of preemption as *policy* is something new? Or is the argument objecting to the use of preventive war as morally wrong and its implementation as policy as something new? Or is the argument objecting to the Bush administration's use of the term "preemption" to describe a policy of "preventive war?" In the case of this last argument, is the point to reveal the Bush administration's deliberate spin on the term, or to poke fun at the fact that perhaps the Bush administration didn't know the difference? The following statement is a good example: "The strategy of preemption is not simply a military strategy, but is, in fact, a kind of barbaric politics, a serious attack against civilized humanity" (Kuang, 2005:161).



Because there is nothing “barbaric” about striking first in a situation of true imminent threat, we can reasonably conclude that although Kuang uses the term “preemption” he is actually describing “preventive war.” Kuang is also clearly commenting on the irony that the world’s leading democracy would revert to such an unacceptable military strategy. Kuang’s sentiments are especially true given the scope of President Bush’s War on Terror. In addition to the fact that this is a huge war that is still unfolding, it’s also a war with unknown multiple fronts, unknown multiple enemies, and with no end in sight. The long-range consequences of “preemptive” strikes against regimes that give sanctuary to terrorists such as the Taliban, failed states that breed terrorism such as Iraq, and state sponsors of terrorism could be with us for generations. Who can possibly say where this could lead us?

Dunwoody and Hammond (2006:20) argue that the U.S. shift to a preemptive policy has substantially increased the inevitability of what they call “false positives,” or in other words, unwarranted, or unprovoked attacks. While Dunwoody and Hammond are actually discussing the policy of preemption here, they are clearly referring to the adoption of the policy as a “shift,” indicating that it is at the very least an alteration of policy, if not an entirely new policy altogether. Moreover, they are articulating the particularly thin line between preemption and preventive war within the context of the war on terror, calling attention to the “inevitability” of “false positives” when employing preemption against non-state actors. Multiply these false positives across the globe for an indefinite period of time, and you’re left with a global preventive war: Armageddon.

The Bush administration, even before 9/11, appears to have been committed to a military solution to the problem of terrorism. Instead of targeting the terrorists directly or pursuing a proportional response, the Bush administration launched full-scale military operations toppling governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Retaliation and continued threats of the use of force against rogue states, justified by the war on terrorism, have become a hallmark of the Bush administration. The collection of evidence and the clear identification of the actual perpetrators of an attack, prior to retaliation, seem to have been abandoned in favor of rapid retaliation against ‘known targets’ (Badey, 2006, 320).

Badey’s statement avoids use of either term, but what he is describing is unquestionably preventive war. While acknowledging that “the mega-terrorist challenge requires some rethinking of the relevance of rules and restraints” based on the Westphalian system, Falk (2002:2) chides the notion of “carrying the retaliatory war to the networked enemy concealed in some sixty countries” as pure insanity. Likewise, Ryan Hendrickson (2005) distinguishes between the Clinton administration which launched retaliatory strikes against specific al Qaeda targets following the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the Bush administration which has launched a *world-wide, preventive* campaign against terror following the September 11, 2001 attacks. This campaign has been so unprecedented that the United States’ membership on the UN Human Rights commission was revoked:

In 2001, following the early actions by the Bush administration, the United States was voted off as a member of the UN Human Rights Commission... the United States had been a member of the Commission since its inception... The international community was sending the United States a message (Carter, 2003:18).

Finally, Alan Elsner argues that the Bush administration’s policy of preemptive strikes against potential future threats “marks a stark change” in U.S. foreign policy. “Potential” and “future” threats are hardly imminent, thus one could reasonably conclude that Elsner is also discussing the policy of preventive war (Democracy Now, 2002).

There is also a large body of scholars, security professionals and journalists alike, that argue the Bush administration’s preventive war approach is as equally unwarranted as it is unprecedented. For example, Lantis and Moskowitz (2005:90) contend that the Bush administration deliberately took full advantage of the immediate post-9/11 security environment to “implement a new strategy

calling for preemptive strikes against potential enemies.” The authors’ specific wording: *preemptive* strikes against *potential* enemies implies an opportunism on the part of the Bush administration. It also leaves one to contemplate just how potential an imminent threat can be. Once again, this appears to be a case where the use of the term “preemption” is clearly used to denounce preventive war.

The sample of scholarship and journalism on the history of the policy of preemption included in this study is far more critical of the Bush administration than it is sympathetic. This is no doubt due to the dubious use of the term “preemptive” to also mean “preventive war.” If this small sample is representative of the entire body of work available, the consensus is that preemption, while perhaps not new as a *strategy*, is certainly new as a *policy* to liberal democracy:

The strategy of preemption is a sign of America’s abandonment of both traditional Western international regulatory systems and the principle of rule by law as established under the U.N. Charter. Instead, America is bringing about the return to an era where naked power takes preeminence (Kuang, 2005:160).

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki can truly be debated as both preemptive strikes and preventive war. Yet, while some may correctly argue that Japan posed an imminent threat to the United States, and others may correctly argue that there were certainly other alternatives available, very few would ever even try to justify the carnage and brutality of Fat Man[3] and Little Boy[4] today. Yet this is exactly what we find ourselves contemplating in this debate over the validity of “preemptive” strikes. Right or wrong, moral or immoral, as Dunwoody and Hammond have argued, it is the “inevitability” of unwarranted attacks that preventive war unleashes that we should be contemplating. If we are not prudent in our actions, Kuang’s “era of naked power” could well be a portent for our times.

This section has revealed that while the history of the strategy of preemption as defined by Gaddis (requires imminent threat) does indeed precede President George W. Bush, the Bush administration’s use of preemption as policy is viewed by many as new to western-style democracy. However, this article also establishes broad agreement that the policy of “preemption” as advocated by the Bush administration is actually the doctrine of preventive war. While there are definitely two schools of thought on the overall acceptability of the preventive war doctrine and its effectiveness in countering terrorism, there is also broad agreement that the implementation of the doctrine of preventive war as *policy* is unique to the George W. Bush administration. Whether the Obama administration will continue this policy is a serious consideration for scholars and policy planners alike.

## History of American Military Hegemony

*“Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”*

—President George W. Bush, 2002 *National Security Strategy*

Much like we questioned the origins and extent of American unilateralism and the policy of preemption before President George W. Bush, we can also question the origins and extent of American military hegemony before the Bush administration. Was military hegemony ever previously a standard of American foreign policy? Or was the Bush administration secretly thanking heaven for September 11?

While David Hendrickson and Robert Tucker (2006) note that the Bush Doctrine is “a radical departure from an American tradition of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states,” John Owen (2006:38) points to individuals such as Henry Clay, who wanted to “spread

republicanism by force.” Owen also argues that the American “tradition of non-intervention itself emerged and persisted in part because America was, until the late 19th century, a puny power.” Owen insists that once America grew stronger, it became more willing to “intervene in the domestic affairs of other states.” Alfred Mahan agrees, citing that the United States established American military hegemony in the Western Hemisphere with the Monroe Doctrine (Akturk, 2006).

Bruce Walker (2004) points to the collapse of the Soviet Union as the beginning of American military hegemony. This seems obvious enough unless we use American military spending since the end of the Cold War as a measure. One would expect the emergence of American military hegemony to be accompanied by increased military spending, but we find that the opposite is the case for this time period. Beginning in the 1990s, the American economy encountered tremendous economic growth. Defense spending plummeted from 6.5 percent of GDP to roughly 3.5 percent. The Clinton administration eliminated the deficit and actually achieved a budget surplus. When the Bush administration came to power, however, it initiated the largest increase in military spending since the Cold War. Consequently, the surplus disappeared (Rogov, 2002). To put this in perspective, actual military expenditures rose from \$289 billion in 1998 to \$626.1 billion in 2007 (52.7 percent of federal spending).<sup>[5]</sup> The projected military expenditure for 2008 is \$643.9 billion (Shah, 2007). The total budget for the Bush administration’s defense program between 2002 and 2011 is over \$5.3 trillion dollars (Committee on the Budget, 2007).

These figures instead suggest that if one were using defense spending as a measure, American military hegemony emerged with the George W. Bush administration. The Bush administration on the other hand, justifies the massive increase in defense spending during its first and second terms with the increased threat of terrorism. The War in Iraq alone is expected to cost \$2,267 billion through 2016 (Reuters, 2007). Of course, military spending alone is just one measurement, and it by no means establishes the origin of American military hegemony. After all, Cold War military expenditures were excessive as well. And let’s not forget that during World War II defense spending was 35 percent of GDP, compared to only 3.9 percent today (Committee on the Budget, 2007).

Another measure of military hegemony is the United States’ world-wide military presence. Currently the United States has troops stationed in 226 countries around the world and permanent military bases in 63 countries (Buermann, 2007). Max Boot (2002) calls our attention to the enormous difference between the “temporary wartime buildup” of past administrations and the “permanent policy of maintaining U.S. military hegemony” called for in the 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS). Boot calls this new strategy “quite a change from U. S. tradition.”

Still another measure is U.S. foreign policy. A fundamental difference between the Clinton and Bush administrations is that the Clinton administration “focused on terrorism primarily as a law enforcement issue while the Bush administration approached terrorism as a military problem.” Clinton’s approach was grounded in “efforts to develop and codify international legal cooperation through multilateral treaties and agreements,” while President Bush’s unilateral approach entailed “significant increases in U.S. military spending, and the invasion of both Afghanistan and Iraq” (Badey, 2006:308-10). President Bush (2002) has made it clear that his primary solution to international security is based on “the essential role of American military strength.”

Judith Miller (2002) points to the stark difference between the 2002 NSS call for the United States to “vanquish” its enemies as opposed to the “balance of power” policy of containment, which was the “mainstay of American foreign policy since World War II.” Robert Bellah (2003:25) strongly echoes this position stating that “the National Security document of September 2002 claims world military hegemony.”

Still others such as Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke (2005:387) blatantly claim that American military hegemony is the offspring of the George W. Bush administration itself. Convinced that the “structural position of the USA as the world’s sole remaining superpower had to be translated into

a more comprehensive vision for promoting regime change in an anarchic international environment," the authors insist that the Bush administration changed its vision into a mission with a little help from 9/11. By tracing the premeditated pursuit of American military hegemony back to the Bush administration *before* September 11, 2001 (thereby countering the Bush administration's argument that the increased military spending was due to terrorism), Wilhelmsen and Flikke argue that the 9/11 attacks provided a convenient opportunity to both dramatically increase military spending and America's world-wide military presence.

Likewise, Michael Lind (2007) points out that while the first Bush administration (George H. W. Bush) and the Clinton administration "viewed the United States as a status quo power," the second Bush administration (George W. Bush) is "inclined to use U.S. power to revise and change the international order." Francis Fukuyama (2006) also compares these same three administrations, indicating the distinct difference between the "leadership" of the first two as compared to the "unilateralism" of the third. According to Fukuyama, it is precisely this unilateral aspect of American foreign policy that makes American military hegemony something new.

Barry Buzan (2006:1101) advances the idea that after the end of the Cold War, Washington experienced a "threat deficit" that it searched for some time to replace: "first Japan, then China, 'clash of civilizations' and rogue states." Nothing could replace the Cold War to validate the United States' role as leader of the West. When long at last the 9/11 attacks provided the impetus needed, the neoconservatives were ready and waiting. The "GWOT had the feel of a big idea that might provide a long-term cure for Washington's threat deficit."

In the months leading up to the attack on Iraq in 2003, in an effort to connect Iraq to the greater war on terrorism, the Bush administration tried desperately to convince the world that Iraq was in bed with al-Qaeda. Ansar al-Islam ("Partisans of Islam"), an al-Qaeda-affiliated guerilla group in Kurdish North Iraq, was alleged by the Bush administration to be the link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell specifically cited the group before the United Nations on February 5, 2003 "as a key reason" to invade Iraq. But as the invasion grew closer, the Bush administration shifted its justification for attacking Iraq from its connection to al-Qaeda (Ansar al-Islam) to the threat posed by Iraq's supposed cache of WMD. "After the war, it became a matter of common wisdom that Saddam had no links to al-Qaeda." Nor did Iraq have any WMD (Schanzer, 2004:41).

Jessica Stern (2004:111) has expressed similar skepticism regarding the Bush administration's sincerity or honesty concerning the actual threat of terrorism. Stern observes a "growing suspicion that the government sees value in making us more afraid and distracting us from foreign policy errors that are making America more hated and Americans less safe." Stern points to President Bush's continual rhetoric that America was in a battle with evil. She asserts that the Bush administration generated unnecessary fear immediately after the attacks and then capitalized on that fear in every way possible. One way that the Bush administration took advantage of the public outcry against terrorism was to hold alleged terrorists in custody indefinitely without formal charges or representation. Another example is the USA Patriot Act, approved overwhelmingly by Congress and signed by President Bush on October 26, 2001, just a few weeks after the attacks. Yet the reach of the Patriot Act is unprecedented, overriding some 48 state laws regarding the privacy of library records, allowing search and seizure without a judicial warrant, and denying Congress any oversight on how it is implemented. Stern also questions why in May 2004, then Attorney General John Ashcroft requested the help of American citizens to locate certain terrorist suspects when six of the seven names of the suspects were well known to the police and no new threat had been reported to law enforcement agencies in May 2004, only to the public. Was this possibly an attempt to refocus the attention of voters away from the news of the atrocities the administration was committing in the war on terror? Stern insists that many believe it was just that:

The 'war on terrorism' is a multi-billion dollar exercise to protect Americans from a danger that, excluding the September 11, 2001 attacks, killed less people per year over several decades than bee stings and lightning strikes. Even in 2001, America's worst year of terrorist deaths, the casualties from terrorism were still vastly outnumbered by deaths from auto-related accidents, gun crimes, alcohol and tobacco-related illnesses, suicides, and a large number of diseases like influenza, cancer, and heart disease. Globally, terrorism, which kills a few thousand per year, pales into insignificance next to the 40,000 people who die every day from hunger, the half a million people who die every year from small wars, the 150,000 annual deaths from increased diseases caused by global warming, and the millions who die from AIDS (Jackson, 2005:157).

Scholars, security professionals and journalists alike have published countless scathing criticisms of the way the Bush administration has conducted itself in the name of the war on terror:

In the last five and a half years, with bipartisan support, Washington has invaded two countries and sent troops around the world from Somalia to the Philippines to fight Islamic militants. It has ramped up defense spending by \$187 billion—more than the combined military budgets of China, Russia, India and Britain. It has created a Department of Homeland Security that now spends more than \$40 billion a year. It has set up secret prisons in Europe and a legal black hole in Guantanamo, to hold, interrogate and—by some definitions—torture prisoners (Zakaria, 2007:24).

Beyond the question of the origin or emergence of American military hegemony, is the debate over whether it is advantageous, ethical or moral. In addition to the obvious neoconservatives, there are those such as Bradley Thayer (2006:32) who argue that American primacy is both appropriate and preferable to any other alternative available. "A grand strategy based on American primacy means ensuring the United States stays the world's number one power—the diplomatic, economic and military leader." Thayer discounts arguments that the U.S. should "retrench" because it "lacks the power to maintain its primacy" or because the "maintenance of primacy will lead the United States into the trap of 'imperial overstretch.'" Thayer says that those who call for retrenchment (isolationists, selective engagers, and offshore balancers) are misguided. Rather than peace, Thayer argues that retrenchment would bring "instability and war in the world." To Thayer, the only option available to America is to ensure its primacy by defending its homeland and the free flow of oil around the world. Many of Thayer's points are prevalent among conservative thinkers.

While American hegemony is enforced via its extraordinary military advantage, its popularity is often grounded in everyday, common ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is "the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything" (Sumner, 2002:13). America is no different than any other group of people; all are ethnocentric. And a certain amount of national pride is innocent enough. But when coupled with American military superiority, unilateralism and the policy of preemption (preventive war), many in the international community have come to view America as far *more dangerous* than any other threat known to man. While terrorism is a serious threat to international security "no less than two-thirds of the world's population feels the United States is the greatest single threat their nations face" (Carter, 2003:18).

Here in America, this may be difficult to comprehend. Many Americans simply can't imagine how the greatest democracy in the world could be viewed as such a threat. Jackson (2005:150) argues that this is primarily because, while we were bombarded with media coverage of the 9/11 attacks, repeatedly referred to as "Ground Zero," [6] we never saw any media coverage "showing pictures of bombed Afghan civilians." This deliberate censorship flies in the face of liberal democracy. But as Jackson reveals, the American public has been intentionally deceived. Lynch (2002) on the other hand, insists that other members of the international community have not been so deceived; revealing that in 2002 the United Nations reported al Qaeda recruitment had increased substantially in nearly 40 countries once the United States began preparing to invade Iraq.

In a similar vein, Thomas (2004) criticizes America for preferring “to conduct massive bombing campaigns against other states without much fear of casualties to American forces.” Thomas contends that the United States has done this time and time again, despite the necessity of it, the justness of the cause, or the civilian casualties incurred. He states that “Washington wants other states to trust its noble intentions, but the record of U.S. military interventions in Vietnam, Iraq, Panama, Afghanistan, and other places would give rise to doubts.” In addition to the suspicions many in the global theater have developed concerning America’s benevolent intentions, there is also a growing awareness of its insensitivity to other cultures and values:

“The human desire for freedom is universal ...” This is a favorite Bush trope. In some sense it might be true. But if this uniform human desire exists, it is often buried under layers of culture and institutional impediments that prevent its expression (Lowry, 2006:24).

Falk (2002) reminds us that as Americans we tend to be blind to our nation’s ills. We automatically assume that our notion of liberal democracy is the best and more-or-less only way to govern a nation. But taken from the perspective of another, equally ethnocentric group of people, America is riddled with violent crimes, addictions of all kinds, domestic violence, vice, greed, and immorality. America’s liberal democracy has not spared us any of these ills; nor has America’s great wealth spared an unacceptably large percentage of its own population from hunger, homelessness, inaccessibility to healthcare, and the consuming nihilism of poverty. Yet as of December 2008, America spends *\$12 billion per month* on the war in Iraq!

According to Falk, it’s not surprising that other cultures want no part in our liberal democracy, yet America insists on thrusting it upon them anyway, often by force. This is because America thinks that America is the best. Furthermore, America thinks that America knows what’s best for everyone else. While neither of the above are necessarily true, unfortunately America has the military strength to impose its will upon others.

President Bush’s conception of “military strength beyond challenge,” necessarily subjugates all other militaries of the world to U.S. domination:

One can only wonder at the reaction of foreign ministries around the world, say in Paris or Beijing, when confronted by this language, which dramatically diminishes traditional sovereign rights, as well as by the reinforcing moves to scrap the ABM treaty, to build a missile defense shield and to plan for the weaponization of space (Falk, 2002:4).

Stephen Walt (2002:74) cautions that the military effort to “combat global terrorism is likely to reinforce the fears and resentment that gave rise to al-Qaeda in the first place.” Walt further warns that the “longer this effort takes, and the more it requires the United States to interfere in other countries’ business, the greater the chance of a hostile backlash later on.” Walt (2004) reveals that this backlash can be seen in more than one area of foreign relations, pointing out that despite the close relations established between the United States and most of Europe since World War II, 2003 “marked the lowest point in transatlantic relations since World War II.” While Walt explains that the relationship had been disintegrating for “several years-fueled largely by European concerns about American unilateralism,” he also clearly states that “the crucial event was the U.S.- led invasion of Iraq in March 2003.”

Beyond the question of whether American military hegemony is moral or ethical, we also explore whether it is politically advantageous. Conservative thinkers such as Bradley Thayer insist that, beyond being an advantageous approach, it is the *only* way to maintain the status quo. Others such as Richard De Zoysa (2005:149) argue that it is precisely the West’s use of its superior wealth and military strength to prop up corrupt regimes in favor of their own interests, and at the expense of the people, that “fuels militancy and hatred.” Likewise, the Bush administration’s



increasing reliance on technology via air strikes and “search and destroy missions” that kill innocent civilians creates a “recruiting ground for terror.”

Posen (2003) assures us that America's military superiority may very well keep us at the top of the food chain today, pointing out that in 2001 the United States D.O.D. budget for military research and development alone was roughly equal to the entire military budgets of France and Germany combined. However, by 2025 the world's population is projected to grow to 8 billion; with most of this growth taking place in the developing world. This could mean real problems for a technology-rich, but dwindling U.S. military. The enemies that America is creating today will surely be far too numerous to fight by conventional means tomorrow.

De Zoysa (2005:150) insists that President Bush's war on terror “offers the terrorists a combative status as military equals in which governments can easily lose their moral authority through the careless bombing of innocents.” The Bush administration's superior weaponry may minimize American casualties now, but De Zoysa and many others, insists that a military approach is not the solution: “only patient work promoting human rights and internationalism can succeed in the long term.”

Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson (2007) propose a scenario in which terrorists attack a particular target with the strategic goal of provoking the targeted government into retaliating, and thus radicalizing the population. This scenario results in substantially increased support for the terrorist organization and a loss of support for more moderate groups. The authors conclude that the key component in such a scenario is public perception of the situation, not the actual facts. This strongly supports the concept that the war on terror is a battle of ideas more so than a battle that can be won by virtue of military superiority. “Every time American troops shoot into a crowd, even in self defense, the image of America as a reckless, ruthless oppressor is highlighted” (Stern, 2004:119). In the words of Indiana Senator Richard Lugar: “military operations alone will not win the longer war on terrorism” (Committee on Foreign Relations, 2006:1).

Based on the samples of scholarship and journalism reviewed above, it is obvious that while there are some who claim that American military hegemony emerged prior to the George W. Bush administration, there are a great deal who claim that today's particular brand of military hegemony is unique to the Bush administration alone. Also, while there are those who champion U.S. military primacy in the world as sound foreign policy, there is also a substantial number who view it as immoral, unethical, and extremely dangerous. The very existence of this debate itself may one day prove that there are at least two paths to international peace. It may also prove that peace is unattainable. We can only hope that it does not one day confirm the words of Albert Einstein: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”

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3. Fat Man was the bomb that exploded over Nagasaki on August 9, 1945.
4. Little Boy was the bomb that exploded over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.
5. Compared to health at 5.6 percent of total federal spending and education at 6.3 percent (Shah, 2007).
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